



# It's Not Just Part of the Job

Breaking the Silence on  
Sexual Harassment in the Library



# Presenters

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# Asking questions

- To ask questions via GoToWebinar, please use the chatbox at right.
- To ask an anonymous question, please use the URL that appears at the top of your screen.
  - Be sure to log out of Google accounts should you wish to remain anonymous!
- Questions will not be archived.

How do you define sexual harassment?

“We don’t talk about this.”

63%

faced sexual harassment from members of the public

# Library Literature Review

- A librarian's helpful, approachable demeanor may be misinterpreted by other people, and make it difficult for the librarian to speak out, either to the patron or to management.
- Virtual reference services allow for more complicated interactions between patrons and librarians.
- "I don't know any female librarian who hasn't been harassed or asked out while at work."\*
- More articles & conversations started in the wake of #MeToo and #TimesUp - see Kelly Jensen's "[The State of Sexual Harassment in the Library](#)" or Katie MacBride's "[#TimesUp on Harassing Your Public Librarian](#)"

\*Abrams, Ingrid. "Please Don't Say This to a Librarian," *The Magpie Librarian*, July 9, 2012, <https://magpielibrarian.wordpress.com/2012/07/09/please-dont-say-this-to-a-librarian/>.

# Sexual Harassment

## 101

What is sexual harassment?

How do you identify harassment?

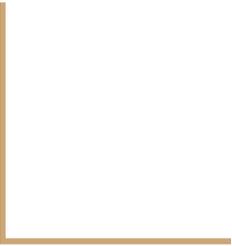
How can we empower staff?

Why should we talk about it?

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What is sexual harassment?





United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
and the Empowerment of Women

Sexual harassment includes such **unwelcome sexually determined behaviour** as **physical contact and advances, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography and sexual demands**, whether by words or actions. Such conduct can be **humiliating** and may constitute a health and safety problem; it is **discriminatory** when the woman has reasonable ground to believe that her objection would **disadvantage her in connection with her employment**, including recruitment or promotion, or when it creates a **hostile working environment**.

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation 19, Violence against women (Eleventh session, 1992), U.N. Doc. A/47/38 at 1 (1993), reprinted in Compilation of General Comments and General Recommendations Adopted by Human Rights Treaty Bodies, U.N. Doc. HRI/GEN/1/Rev.6 at 243 (2003).



Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Title VII's broad prohibitions against sex discrimination specifically cover:

**Sexual Harassment:** This includes practices ranging from direct requests for sexual favors to workplace conditions that create a hostile environment for persons of either gender, including same sex harassment.

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), "Federal Laws Prohibiting Job Discrimination Questions & Answers," <https://www.eeoc.gov/facts/qanda.html> (2009).

# Who's affected by sexual harassment?

- Women are not the only targets of sexual harassment.
- Some studies show people of color experience a higher incidence of sexual harassment than their white colleagues.
- Some studies show LGBTQ people experience a higher incidence of sexual harassment than their straight and/or cisgender colleagues.
- Underage workers (teen employees in grades 9-12) face sexual harassment too.

*Sexual harassment can happen to anyone.*

*For people of color and LGBTQ people, the experience is many-layered.*

*For teens, problems may manifest in different ways.*

# People of Color & Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment of people of color isn't just about sex or gender - it's about race, too.

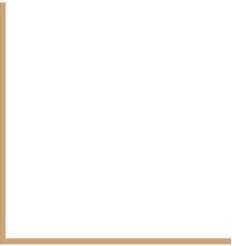
- People of color are frequently stereotyped and sexualized, and these systemic issues affect the frequency and nature of the harassment they experience.
- Perceptions of behaviors as sexually harassing ones differ across cultural groups. At the same time, women of all cultural and ethnic backgrounds contend with cultural and generational expectations of their behavior (and of the way they are treated.)
- People of color (and LGBTQ people) report that they are less likely to be believed when reporting harassing behavior.

# LGBTQ People & Sexual Harassment

- Transgender and gender non-conforming individuals experience sexual harassment at a higher incidence.
- Studies suggest intersection between transphobia and racism.
- LGBTQ youth are at particular risk for sexual harassment and violence.
- Sexual harassment may include derogatory remarks about sexual orientation - whether or not the person identifies as LGB+.
- Outing colleagues is never OK.



“Not everyone recognizes  
when they’re being harassed.”



# Three Types of Sexual Harassment

**Gender harassment:** unwelcome and offensive comments and behaviors that discriminate based on the target's gender identity

**Unwanted sexual attention:** unwelcome, persistent comments and behaviors that are driven by sexual innuendo or requests, verbal or tactile

**Sexual coercion:** threats or bribes to coerce the target into sexual activities

# Who can be a sexual harasser?

## Internal

- Colleagues (peers and supervisors)
- Contractors
- Volunteers

## External

- Library patrons
- Members of the public
- Vendors
- Colleagues from other organizations

# Recognizing Harassing Behaviors

“It’s hard to tell the difference between harassment and mental illness.”

Harassing behaviors can include:

- Unwelcome sexual advances
- Requests or bribes for sexual activity
- Direct or indirect threats
- Sexual innuendos, comments, and jokes
- Unwelcome touching, including brushing against a person
- Pervasive displays of materials with sexually illicit or graphic content
- Attempted or completed sexual assault
- Quid pro quo

# What does this behavior look like in the library?

- Referring to library staff as “baby,” “sweetheart,” “gorgeous,” etc.
- Asking staff members on a date
- Staring at a staff member’s chest when they are wearing a name tag
- Asking for a staff member’s personal contact information
- Following a staff member into a secluded area of the library
- Making inappropriate physical contact
- Taking photos of a staff member without their permission
- Asking about a staff member’s schedule (what time they take lunch, what time they leave for the day, etc.)
- Making inappropriate and/or suggestive comments about a staff member’s appearance
- Inquiring about a staff member’s marital or relationship status

# Underage Workers & Sexual Harassment

## How do teens experience sexual harassment?

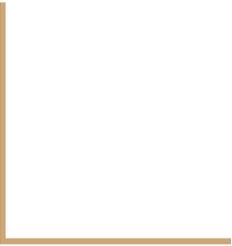
- Being asked out even if they said no
- Repeated requests for social or sexual activity
- Inappropriate touching
- Sexual rumors about them
- Comments about their bodies, clothes, sexual orientation, or sexual behavior
- Intimidation or assault
- Harassment and bullying on social media

## How do you spot the signs of sexual harassment?

- Distracted performance or decline in work quality
- Psychomatic stress symptoms (headaches, stomach pains, insomnia, irritability)
- Drop in self-esteem
- Negative emotions (anger, anxiety, betrayal, depression)



“Employees should feel safe, and know that they are supported by managers.”



# Best Practices for Addressing Sexual Harassment

Adopt a strong anti-harassment **policy**, periodically **train** each employee on its contents, and vigorously **follow and enforce** it. The policy should include:

- A clear **explanation** of prohibited conduct, including examples
- Clear assurance that employees who make complaints or provide information related to complaints will be **protected against retaliation**
- A clearly described **complaint process** that provides multiple, accessible avenues of complaint
- Assurance that the employer will protect the **confidentiality** of harassment complaints to the extent possible
- A complaint process that provides a prompt, thorough, and impartial investigation
- Assurance that the employer will take **immediate and appropriate corrective action** when it determines that harassment has occurred.

# What to say in an uncomfortable situation

## Keep it simple

- “That question is inappropriate.”
- “I do not answer questions about my personal life.”
- “My name is not ‘sweetie’/‘baby’/‘honey.’ Please do not call me that again.”

## Redirect conversation to the library

- “Do you have a question about the library?”
- “That has no bearing on my ability to assist you in the library.”

## Bring in a third party

- “Would you care to speak with a manager/security officer about this?”

## Remove yourself from the situation

- “I will have someone else finish assisting you.”
- “If this behavior continues, I will ask you to leave the library.”

**Practice if these phrases feel uncomfortable!**

# What to do in an uncomfortable situation

- Make eye contact.
- Keep your voice calm, level, and firm.
- Refer to library guidelines or policies if necessary.
- Remove yourself from the situation.
- Inform a coworker/manager/security officer.

If you notice a coworker being harassed, and you feel comfortable intervening...

- Address the behavior directly.
  - “That question is inappropriate.”
- Ask your coworker if they would like someone else to step in.
- Get your coworker to a safe space if necessary.
  - The “emergency phone call from the office”
- Inform a coworker/manager/security officer.

**In all cases, inform a manager and document the incident!**

# Third-party observers

## What is a third party observer?

- An individual who observes another person being harassed
  - Another member of staff
  - A patron
- “Harassing behavior” refers to behaviors (actions, gestures, words) that makes the third-party observer feel uncomfortable.
  - Same process will be followed if a patron observes harassment of an employee and raises a concern to another staff member

## What to do:

- Report the behavior to your manager
- Talk with your manager before addressing the issue with your colleague
- Manager will call a meeting to ask that employee for their feedback
- If a patron reports that a staff member was being harassed, follow the same protocol as you would for any other incident, then follow the steps above.

# It is okay to walk away.

If you are not comfortable addressing the behavior...

You are under no obligation to say something in every uncomfortable situation.

- Remove yourself from the situation, if physically able to do so.
  - "I'm going back to the desk now."
  - "I'm going to find someone else to assist you"
  - Or just turn around and walk away
- Inform a coworker/manager/security officer
- Document the incident

If you have said something, but the behavior continues...

You are under no obligation to continue assisting this person.

- Remove yourself from the situation
- Inform a coworker/manager/security officer
- Document the incident

# Your People are not bad PR

- Encourage your team to speak up.
- Don't shy away from difficult topics because you don't want to risk a public discussion.
- Enlist support from your marketing/communications/PR team and HR for crisis management support from an external & internal perspective.
- These issues are serious. Any allegation of sexual harassment *must* be investigated by the organization.

# Starting the conversation with administration

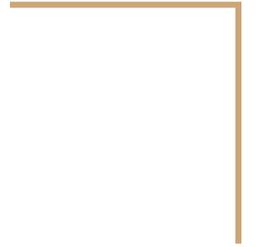
## Who should I talk to?

- Coworkers
- Safety staff
- Manager
- HR
- Assistant/Deputy Director
- Director

## What should I say?

- Be prepared to describe the types of behavior you've encountered.
- Describe the impact harassing behaviors have had on your work.
- Ask for support in addressing the issue.
- Bring ideas to share.
- Ask for a timeline and set expectations for everyone.

Q & A



# Resources

## Introductions to sexual harassment

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), "Federal Laws Prohibiting Job Discrimination Questions & Answers," <https://www.eeoc.gov/facts/qanda.html> (2009).

"Best Practices for Employers and Human Resources/EEO Professionals." U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Accessed June 18, 2017. <https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/initiatives/e-race/bestpractices-employers.cfm>.

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"Know Your Rights: Workplace Sexual Harassment." American Association of University Women. Accessed June 18, 2017. <http://www.aauw.org/what-we-do/legal-resources/know-your-rights-at-work/workplace-sexual-harassment/>.

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# Resources

## Sexual harassment & diversity

Buchanan, NiCole T. and Carolyn M. West. "Sexual Harassment in the Lives of Women of Color." In Landrine & Russo, Eds. *Handbook of Diversity in Feminist Psychology*. New York: Springer Publishing, 2010. 449-476.

Fogarty, Kate. "Teens and Sexual Harassment: Making a Difference." University of Florida. Accessed June 18, 2017. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy850>.

Ontiveros, Maria L. "Three Perspectives on Workplace Harassment of Women of Color." *Golden Gate U. L. Rev* 23:3 (1993).  
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"Research Brief: Sexual Violence & Individuals Who Identify As LGBT." National Sexual Violence Research Center and Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape. Accessed June 18, 2017.  
[http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/Publications\\_NSVRC\\_Research-Brief\\_Sexual-Violence-LGBTQ.pdf](http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/Publications_NSVRC_Research-Brief_Sexual-Violence-LGBTQ.pdf)

Woods, Krystle C. et al.. "Sexual Harassment Across the Color Line: Experiences and Outcomes of Cross- Versus Intraracial Sexual Harassment Among Black Women." *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 15, vol. 1: 67-76, 2009.

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# Resources

## Sexual harassment in libraries

Civitello, Amanda & Katie McLain. "It's Not Just Part of the Job: Speaking Out About Sexual Harassment," *ILA Reporter* 35, no. 6 (2017).  
<https://www.ila.org/publications/ila-reporter/article/75/it-s-not-just-part-of-the-job-speaking-out-about-sexual-harassment>

Good, Laura & Rae Cooper. "But It's Your Job to Be Friendly: Employees Coping With and Contesting Sexual Harassment From Customers in the Service Sector," *Gender, Work and Organization* 23, no. 5 (2016): 447-469, doi: 10.1111/gwao.12117.

Jensen, Karen. "Things They Don't Teach You in Library School: Sexual Harassment? Yes it Can Happen in the Library," *Teen Librarian Toolbox* (blog), March 24, 2013,  
<http://www.teenlibrariantoolbox.com/2013/03/things-they-dont-teach-you-in-library-school-sexual-harassment-yes-it-can-happen-in-the-library/>

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# Resources

## Sexual harassment in libraries

Jensen, Kelly. "The State of Sexual Harassment in the Library." *Book Riot*, October 24, 2017. <https://bookriot.com/2017/10/24/sexual-harassment-library/>

MacBride, Katie. "#TimesUp on Harassing Your Public Librarian," *Shondaland*, January 31, 2018. <https://www.shondaland.com/act/a15876574/timesup-on-harassing-your-public-librarian/>

Moore, Victoria. "Sexual Harassment and the Library Don't Mix," *Library Mosaics* 16, no. 6 (2005): 18-19, doi:

Thompson, Samantha H. "Pixelated Problem Patrons: Or, the Trials of Working Virtual Reference and What We've Learned From It," *The Reference Librarian* 50, no. 3 (2009): 291-296, doi: 10.1080/02763870902947125.

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# Questions? Want to continue the conversation?

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Reach out via Google Form: [bit.ly/LibrariansToo](https://bit.ly/LibrariansToo)

Feedback submitted through the form will be anonymous, but archived and subject to disclosure.